

LOUISVILLE COURIER JOURNAL (KY)
9 February 1980

By 1989, a SALT-less world will be much more dangerous

IN MILITARY and geopolitical strategy, as in the pages of *Vogue*, fashion is a stern master. A few months ago, SALT II was all the rage. Today it is banished from political discourse, and everyone in Washington is talking about Persian Gulf bases and rapid deployment forces.

But the unfashionable people who run this nation's intelligence establishment haven't gotten the word. They've just produced a new and very frightening picture of what the world would be like by the end of this decade without a SALT treaty.

According to *The Washington Post*, the new study (technically "National Intelligence Estimate 113879") indicates the Soviet Union could have as many as 14,000 highly accurate nuclear warheads on their land-based missiles by 1989, in the absence of SALT constraints. That's 133 percent more than the 6,000 they could be expected to deploy under SALT.

Admittedly, the treaty, in the unlikely event of Senate ratification, would expire in 1985. If it weren't extended beyond that year, the Russians presumably would add to their arsenal. But the five years of restraint purchased by SALT still would mean lower Soviet warhead levels by 1989 than if the treaty is scuttled now.

Without SALT, of course, the U.S. also would be free to build and deploy more strategic weapons. But the cost of just keeping even with the Russians would be enormous. Take, for example, the proposed MX missile. If the intelligence estimate is anywhere near correct, the program for hiding these mobile missiles among multiple shelters would have to be greatly expanded.

Because the Russians would be able to deploy so many more warheads in the absence of SALT, the amount of land needed for MX shelters in Nevada and Utah

would treble and the \$30 billion price tag for the program would double. Even then, there would be no guarantee that most of the missiles could survive a Soviet attack.

Meantime, the costly action-reaction buildup of land-based missiles is only one aspect of an unrestricted arms race. Both sides presumably also would speed up their missile-carrying submarine programs and build more manned bombers and pilotless cruise missiles. The nuclear arms competition in Europe, which can be slowed only if there's a SALT treaty first, doubtless would accelerate, too.

The irony, of course, is that the SALT treaty has been derailed by precisely the sort of crisis that makes nuclear restraint so necessary — the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. While the United States hasn't resisted this invasion militarily, it almost surely would fight — as President Carter warned — to prevent a Soviet takeover of the Persian Gulf. But because U.S. conventional forces would be so outnumbered in such a conflict, a Pentagon report suggests we might have to resort to tactical nuclear weapons.

If it comes to lobbing tactical nukes, the only hope of averting an atomic holocaust lies in the deterrent value of our strategic forces. Yet these forces would be in far more jeopardy without a SALT treaty.

So the grim warning in the latest intelligence estimate shouldn't be ignored in the scramble to boost military manpower and devise a Persian Gulf strategy.

Yes, we need stronger, more mobile conventional forces. Obviously it would help to have naval and air bases in the Middle East. But the biggest help would be a SALT treaty to prevent a major escalation of the nuclear arms race — an escalation that would divert money urgently needed for other military improvements.